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Estimated Military Force Strengths

	Iraq	Iran
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Army		
Personnel	800,000	800,000-1,000,000
Tanks	3,000(+)	900 (500+ operational)
APCs	2,000(+)	1,000
Artillery	2,300	700
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Air Force/Air Defense		
Personnel	60,000	50,000
Combat Aircraft	500	200 (fewer than 60 operational)
Surface-to-air Missile Launchers	400(+)	300
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Navy		
Personnel	5,000	15,000
Destroyers	0	3
Frigates	0	4
Missile Boats	9	11
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6 December 1985

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Iranian Political Scene

1. Since late 1984, the Khomeini regime has been facing--and generally dealing effectively with--its greatest challenges since consolidating control of Iran in mid-1981. Factionalism within the regime and Khomeini's failing health, economic stagnation and dwindling oil income, war-weariness and Iraqi attacks contributed to increased domestic unrest. Popular demonstrations early this year and other signs of dissent have been ruthlessly suppressed, however, and the populace seems cowed. Moreover, Khomeini has intervened in the political process to balance factional interests and has given preference to pragmatic policies that weaken the radicals and strengthen their moderate-conservative opponents. Tehran has maintained oil exports in the face of repeated Iraqi attacks on Kharq Island and ensured that the lower classes who support clerical rule are adequately supplied with necessary goods and services. The regime's principal challenge in the near term will be to manage popular dissatisfaction and prevent it from spawning an effective anti-regime movement.

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PRINCIPAL PLAYERS

2. The Iranian leadership is split by ideological, personal, and generational differences. One major faction, the radicals, favors greater government control of the economy, aggressive export of the revolution--including use of terrorism--and continuation of the war. Another main faction, a moderate/conservative coalition, seeks to limit government involvement in economic matters, generally opposes violent export of the revolution, and favors a negotiated end to the war.

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3. Some of the most important Iranian leaders--such as Khomeini's recently named heir, Ayatollah Montazeri and Consultative Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani--are pragmatists who support the conservatives on some issues and the radicals on others. Khomeini himself has increasingly tended to fit this description and to support a middle course--except on the war, which he insists must continue until Iraqi President Saddam Husayn falls. Besides Khomeini, the major players are:

Pragmatists

-- Ayatollah Montazeri, a senior cleric in his sixties who has increasingly taken on important duties delegated by Khomeini. Labeled a radical in the early years of the regime, he has become a leading spokesman for more moderate policies and may be arguing for an end to the war. He has strongly criticized the USSR and the US but also has suggested publicly that renewed relations with the US are possible.

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SECRET

-- Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani, a mid-level cleric in his fifties who has emerged as a skilled politician and is now second only to Khomeini in power. A firm believer in tight clerical control, Rafsanjani is an ally of Montazeri, probably because he believes he can control Montazeri after Khomeini's death. He is probably more willing than Montazeri to deal with the Soviets.

-- President Khamenei, a mid-level cleric in his forties who is less politically adept than Rafsanjani but is known as an excellent speaker. He opposes Montazeri but was re-elected earlier this year with Khomeini's backing.

-- Ayatollah Meshkini, a senior cleric in his fifties or sixties who shares with Montazeri responsibility delegated by Khomeini over the Revolutionary Guard, the judiciary, and the clerical community. He is anti-Soviet, a hawk on the war, and a strong supporter of tight clerical political control. He may be a rival to Montazeri.

-- Chief of the Joint Staff Sohrabi, an Army officer in his fifties, may be a protege of the former chief, who was linked to the moderate-conservative coalition. A military professional by inclination rather than a politician, he probably is nevertheless drawn into political maneuvering because of his position.

Radicals

-- Revolutionary Guard Commander Rezai and Guard Minister Rafiq-Dust, laymen in their thirties who have longstanding ties to influential clerics, radical Arab states, and Moslem dissident groups. Recent cutbacks in the Guard's role in law enforcement and internal security may have been aimed in part at reducing their ability to influence the power struggle. One or both may be allies of Rafsanjani.

-- Heavy Industries Minister Nabavi, a layman in his forties who has been repeatedly labelled a leftist and who is an excellent manager, according to Rafsanjani. He has ties to a paramilitary group whose sympathizers hold other influential positions.

-- Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Sheikh-ol-Eslam, a Berkeley-educated layman in his thirties who was a leader of the takeover of the US Embassy and has placed his hostage-taker proteges in the Foreign Ministry. He is a strong advocate of radical foreign policy positions and has been closely linked to terrorist activities.

-- Ground Forces Commander Seyed-Shirazi, an Army officer in his forties who made his reputation fighting Kurdish dissidents in northwestern Iran and purging the Army. He has been a hawk on the war. He may have ties to Montazeri.

Moderates/Conservatives

-- The aged "Grand" Ayatollahs--Shariat-Madari, Golpayegani, Marashi-Najafi, Qomi--who have great religious stature but are philosophically opposed to playing a sustained or leading role in any power struggle. Their influence is felt indirectly through their former students, some of whom hold important posts, and through their supporters in the bazaar.

-- Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani, a senior cleric in his fifties who leads an important clerical group based in Tehran and has held several important government posts. He has strong ties to the regime's paramilitary forces. Mahdavi-Kani has been repeatedly identified as an advocate of moderate policies who wants less clerical involvement in daily government.

-- Ayatollah Musavi-Ardebili, a senior cleric in his fifties who heads the judicial wing of the government. He advocated moderate domestic policies behind the scenes until the last two years, when he has adopted a much more public role.

-- Foreign Minister Velayati, a layman in his forties, who is typical of the talented technocrats working to create a less radical regime. He has repeatedly been mentioned as a leading candidate to become prime minister.

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OPPOSITION

4. Exiled opponents of the regime lack sufficient assets to exploit its problems. They have no leader or program capable of challenging Khomeini's charisma and ideology. Exile groups are further limited by restricted contacts inside Iran, minimal popular support, and constant bickering among themselves.

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5. The most effective opposition to the radical elements of the clerical regime comes from the moderate/conservative coalition within the government. Other domestic interest groups that are potential threats to any form of clerical government include:

-- Labor. The government seems to have effectively quashed overt labor unrest that emerged late last year in coordinated anti-regime actions throughout Iran, but worker dissatisfaction could help to crystallize broader war-weariness and resentment over the continued decline of the economy.

-- Armed Forces. The regime has repeatedly uncovered coup plots and purged the regular armed forces, but it still suspects their loyalty. Khomeini announced in September that the regular forces would be merged with the Revolutionary Guard, which more strongly supports the Islamic republic. The Guard itself is also suspect, however, as indicated by the recent cutbacks in its internal security role, Khomeini's repeated orders to Guard members to stay out of politics, and rumors of a recent plot that included Guard elements. All factions of the regime recognize that control of the armed forces--and even more so, the Guard--may be crucial in the power struggle and are cultivating contacts within them.

-- Radical Technocrats. These generally young, often Western-trained Iranians play a key role in the administration of Islamic rule, but many are opportunists who resent the prominence of the clerics and hope eventually to replace them with a "progressive,"--i.e. radical--lay government.

We believe all the leaders of the above interest groups are more likely to be willing to deal with the USSR and its allies than are the clerics. A more anti-Soviet stance is evident among:

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[REDACTED]

-- Bazaar Merchants. Pious merchants were a financial mainstay of the anti-Shah movement. Most remain close to the moderate-conservative coalition and want less clerical involvement in politics. Distressed by radical economic policies, they helped to elect a less radical majority in parliamentary elections last year. The merchants generally support the regime's imposition of Islamic mores, but they want to strengthen economic ties with the West. [REDACTED]

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